

MAN is the only creature that laughs, and why

should he not exercise that faculty with which the Creator has endowed him? The man who in anyway lightens by an ounce the weight of the load of human misery has served a purpose in life. Samuel Johnson used to say that it was "worth five hundred pounds a year to any man to be able to see the bright side of things." Charles Lamb, in spite of all his sorrows, said: "A laugh is worth a thousand groans in any state of the market."

The genial Henry Van Dyke says: "I hold a sense of humor to be a means of grace." When some wiseacre said to him, "I am not going to join the church—they are all hypocrites there," he replied: "Never mind, my dear fellow, there is room for one more."

It was Dr. Van Dyke who told the story of the negro who was fishing on the coast of Florida, when a tarpon took hold of his hook and pulled him overboard. He came to the surface and sputtered: "What I wan' to know is is dis nigger a fishin', or is dis fish a niggerin'?"

Carlyle says: "He who wants humor, be his powers what they may, has only half a mind."

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One evening when Beecher was in the midst of an impassioned speech, some one attempted to interrupt him by suddenly crowing like a rooster. A number of people laughed in spite of themselves, and the speaker's friends felt that in a moment the whole effect of Beecher's thrilling appeals might be lost. The orator, however, was equal to the occasion. He stopped, listened till the crowing ceased, and then, with a look of surprise, pulled out his watch. "Morning already?" he said. "My watch is only at ten. But there can be no mistake about it. The instincts of the lower animals are infallible." There was a roar of laughter. The "lower animal" in the gallery collapsed.

A well-known preacher was accosted by a would-be wag, and questioned as follows: "Do you believe the Bible, what it says about the prodigal son and the fattened calf?"—"Certainly I do."—"Well, can you tell me whether the calf that was killed was a male or a female calf?"—"Yes, it was a female calf."—"How do you know that?"—"Because," said he, looking the man in the face, "I see the male is alive now."

A clergyman, stopping at a hotel frequented by wags, was made the object of their raillery. He sat quietly, until at last one in despair of his forbearance said: "I wonder at your patience. Haven't you heard all that has been said to you?"—"Oh, yes; but I am used to it. Such remarks have no effect on me. I am chaplain of a lunatic asylum."

A clergyman preached a rather long sermon from the text, "Thou art weighed in the balance and art found wanting." A good many passed out, to the annoyance of the minister, and stopping, he said: "That is right: as fast as you are weighed, pass out."

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Wit deals with ideas. Humor is a mere happening. Bishop Vincent, in introducing Dr. Henson to a Chautauqua audience, said: "Ladies and gentlemen, we will have a lecture this evening on 'Fools,' by one—of the wisest men in America." That was wit. Dr. Henson stepped forward and said: "Ladies and gentlemen, I am not so much of a fool as Dr. Vincent—would lead you to think." That was ready wit.

A young minister, exchanging pulpits with one of his fellow-preachers, and arriving late, was conducted to the church by the resident minister's fair daughter. The sweet young woman was known by the name of Grace. All aglow with excitement, the young minister rushed up the aisle and gave out the following for the opening hymn:

Amazing, Grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see;
Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis Grace has brought me safe thus far,
And Grace will lead me home.

That was humorous to everyone in the church, except Grace and the minister.

Wit often lies in aptness. In the reign of George II., the See of York became vacant, and his majesty being at a loss for a fit person to appoint to the exalted office, asked the opinion of the Rev. Dr. Mountain, who had raised himself, by his remarkably facetious temper, from being the son of a beggar to the See of Durham. The doctor wittily replied:

CLERICAL WIT AND HUMOR

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"Hadst thou faith as a grain of mustard-seed, thou wouldst say to this mountain," at the same time laying his hand on his breast: "Be removed and be cast into the sea (see)." The king laughed heartily, and forthwith conferred the preferment on the facetious doctor.

Getting the right word in the right place often makes wit, while getting the right word in the wrong place becomes humorous. A young preacher having charge of his first funeral knew that it was customary to announce after the service that those who wished might step up to view the remains; but he thought this was a hackneyed phrase, and instead he said: "The congregation will now pass around the bier."

If dullness was a divine power, the world would have been converted long ago, for the pulpit has never been without an abundant supply of dryness; and if wit be a contraband commodity, it is a marvel that many of those who had wit and humor have taken the highest rank for usefulness. The preachers who have gone about with a countenance grave enough to break an undertaker's heart have seldom been the most useful men. That a sermon may without irreverence be lighted up with a gleam of humor is only going back to the example set by the men whom God wonderfully used to make the world happier and better.

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Take Rowland Hill, a minister of the type which may be said to be apostolic: he allowed his whole redeemed nature to have harmonious play. Men called him eccentric because they themselves were out of center. How sharply did he deal with an affront put upon him in the pulpit! It was his custom to read out any requests for prayer that were sent up to him. One day he began thus: "The prayers of the congregation are desired for"—well, I suppose I must finish what I have begun—for the Rev. Rowland Hill, that he will not go riding about in his carriage on Sundays. If," he gravely continued, "the writer of this piece of folly and impertinence is present and will go into the vestry after service, and let me put a saddle on his back, I will ride him home, instead of going into my carriage."

On one occasion Rowland Hill was preaching for a public charity, when a note was handed to him, inquiring if it would be right for a bankrupt to give to the contribution. He noticed the question in course of his sermon and pronounced decidedly that such a person could not do so in Christian honesty. "But, my friends," he added, "I would advise you who are not insolvent not to pass the plate this evening, as the people will be sure to say: 'There goes the bankrupt!'"

The humor of Joseph Parker leaned rather to the sardonic. It was often employed in covering objectors and interruptors with ridicule, as at the famous conference on preaching in which Gladstone took part, when a man rose from the back of the church to complain of the doctor's exasperating trick of dropping his voice at the end of each sentence until he became inaudible. "I have often noticed," was the retort, "that when a man is deaf he takes a seat as far away from the preacher as possible."

At the meeting at the Cannon Street Hotel to support his candidate for the City of London, one of the audience refused to remove his hat in spite of the exhortations of those around him. At last Dr. Parker intervened. "Let him alone, gentlemen, and let his hat alone; believe me, there is nothing in it," he said, amid roars of laughter.

Robert Hall, the famous Baptist preacher, was a brilliant wit; his social intercourse abounded with jest. He had an extremely large mouth. He was as well aware of this as anyone else, and one morning at a breakfast party at Bristol, on the occasion of family prayers, a young minister, referring to a sermon about to be delivered by the distinguished divine, prayed that the Lord would "open his mouth wider than ever." When they rose from their knees, Mr. Hall, said: "Well, sir, did you pray that my mouth might be open wider? It couldn't well be done, sir, unless it was slit from ear to ear."

He once said of a member of his congregation, that he had such a little soul that it could not only be put into a nut-shell, but that, if there was a maggot-hole in the shell, it would creep out.

Sydney Smith, of whom it was said that he made more people mer-

ry, caused more hearty laughter and innocent amusement than the most popular comedian of his day, was an orthodox clergyman. The "dry-as-dusts" of his day have all been forgotten, while his name smells sweet and blossoms in the dust. Once on entering a drawing-room in a West End mansion, he found it lined with mirrors on all sides. Finding himself reflected in every direction, he said that he supposed he was at a meeting of the clergy, and there seemed to be a most respectable attendance.

Did you ever read his definition of marriage? "It resembles a pair of shears, so joined that they cannot be separated; often moving in opposite directions, yet always punishing anyone who comes between them."

Advised when ill to take a morning walk upon an empty stomach, "Upon whose?" was his inquiry. Preaching a charity sermon, he frequently repeated the assertion that of all nations Englishmen were most distinguished for generosity and love of their species. The collection happened to be inferior to his expectations, and he said he had evidently made a great mistake, for his expression should have been that they were distinguished for the love of their specie.

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Spurgeon's keen mother-wit enlivened his sermons. He once said that some ministers would make good martyrs—they were "so dry that they would burn well."

"Brethren," he observed one day, "if God had referred the Ark to a Committee on Naval Affairs, it is my opinion it wouldn't have been built yet."

Dr. Nathan Colver, many years ago pastor of Tremont Temple, Boston, was once presiding at an anti-slavery meeting in the Temple, where the applause and hisses with which the speakers were greeted were about equal in frequency and vehemence. Stepping forward on the platform, Dr. Colver begged his anti-slavery friends to cease stamping the floor and clapping their hands in reply to the hisses. "Don't you know that you might as well try to get the ding out of a shovel by kicking at it as to try to stamp the hiss out of a goose."

Father Taylor, the famous Seamen's Bethel's preacher in Boston, when a pompous man from upper-tendon appeared at his prayer-meeting and proceeded to deal out advice to his boys, squirmed till the speaker sat down, when he broke out: "If there is any other old sinner from State Street wishes to confess his sins, let him speak now."

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A devout Western man, having occasion to be in New-York over Sunday some years ago, decided that he would improve the opportunity by going over to Brooklyn and hearing Beecher preach. It was the eve of a great local campaign, and the Plymouth pastor preached a stirring sermon calling men to their civic duties. This angered the visitor, who believed that politics had no place in the pulpit, and upon reaching his hotel sat down and wrote to Mr. Beecher:

DEAR SIR: I journeyed over from New-York this morning to hear you preach, feeling, of course, that I should hear a sermon. Instead of that, I got nothing but a political address for my pains. I suppose it means little to you to be told that I was disappointed, but I nevertheless want you to know that there was one man in your congregation who feels that politics has no place in God's temple, and that such political rantings as were your address this morning are unbecoming to a servant of God. Plainly speaking, sir, you made an ass of yourself. Very truly yours,
JOHN BLANK.

Beecher read the letter, and with his characteristic love of fun wrote in reply:

MY DEAR MR. BLANK: I am very sorry you were disappointed at my sermon yesterday morning. Some of us like to think, however, that a man's highest duty as a citizen is essential to Christian character. Still, I regret that you didn't like my words, and I regret even more that you think that I made an ass of myself. However, you have a great consolation in the fact that you will never be put to the trouble and mortification of making an ass of yourself. The Lord did that.

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

Beecher once got from a young woman a legging letter. He did not answer it. A week later she wrote again, saying that if he did not send her ten dollars at once she would be ruined. The preacher wrote:

DEAR MADAM: Any woman who will be ruined for ten dollars is ruined already.